

AoA Caregiver Listserv: Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children

January 7 – January 18, 2002

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INTRODUCTION

The sixth Administration on Aging (AoA) caregiver listserv session, “Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children,” was held from January 7- January 18, 2002. This session provided the aging network participants the opportunity to exchange program ideas for the development of NFCSP programs that are responsive to the needs and preferences of grandparent and other relatives raising children. Ana Beltran, Director of the National Center on Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children, Generations United, served as the research resource for this session.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

The starting point for this session was a paper entitled, “Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Caregivers,” authored by Meredith Minkler, Dr.PH, Professor at the School of Public Health, University of California, Berkeley. The paper underscores the importance of enhancing support to grandparent caregivers, a population that increased by more than 50 percent between 1990 and 1998 largely due to substance abuse, divorce, teen pregnancy, growth in single parent households, the increase in female incarceration, poverty, policy changes favoring placement of children with relatives, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Minkler notes that the aging network has often been at the forefront of developing creative programs to address the needs of older grandparent caregivers and their families. She advises to allocate funds across the state to serve the greatest number of grandparents, but to keep in mind that low-income inner city areas are home to a disproportionately high number of grandparent caregivers. It is recommended that support for grandparent and other relative caregivers focus on health and healthcare access, social isolation and alienation, financial vulnerability and inadequacy of public assistance, legal issues, and housing. Several national resources might prove useful in planning and implementing programs to support grandparent caregivers, including: Brookdale’s Relatives as Parents Program (RAPP), Generations United, AARP’s Grandparent Information Center, and Ana Beltran’s “A Guide to the NFCSP and its Inclusion of Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children.”

Minkler offered the following recommendations to guide program development:

- **“Start where the people are” before deciding on a new program or activity.** Allow these caregivers the opportunity to help shape service development and create the agenda to ensure that programs meet this population’s needs and preferences. Caregiver input can be obtained through several means, including town hall meetings and forums, surveys, and focus groups.

- **Identify and address the specific cultural, linguistic, and other needs and concerns of diverse relative caregivers.** Programs must be tailored to the specific needs and strengths of different population groups. Effective means to respond to cultural diversity issues include working with cultural institutions/organizations in the diverse communities, providing bilingual services (support groups and newsletters), and holding cultural pride events for these relative caregiver families.
- **Develop creative partnerships.** Partnering with other organizations including children and youth organizations, faith-based entities, public sector programs (e.g., Head Start and Section 8 Housing), local hospitals, and schools, will increase the resource base, visibility, and effectiveness of support programs for grandparent caregivers. In addition, partnering with agencies or programs that do not restrict client age might further enhance support for the many relative caregivers who are less than 60 years of age.
- **Think broadly and creatively.** Take advantage of the intentionally broad and nonspecific language in the NFCSP to draw on local knowledge of needs and opportunities to make the most effective use of funds. This is particularly relevant to the use of supplemental services.
- **Build on the strengths of grandparent and other relative caregivers.** Current and former relative caregivers possess many strengths and can be a valuable resource to their communities through trainings and leadership activities, acting as support group leaders or co-facilitators, and as spokespersons with the mass media and policy makers.
- **Maintain communication with organizations that can advocate for policy change.** The network is in the position to help document the need for new policy directions. The provision of documented stories of grandparent and relative caregivers, either adversely affected by existing (housing or welfare) policies or benefiting from new programs and services, will increase the knowledge base of advocacy groups as they work to promote policy change.

*The full paper as it appeared in this listserv session, including a comprehensive list of promising practices and recommended resources, can be accessed through the AoA Web page, Implementing the National Family Caregiver Support Program, at:

<http://www.aoa.gov/carenetwork>. (Click on “Program Development Issue Briefs”)

AGING NETWORK RESPONSES

Several questions arose from the discussion including how other AAAs and SUAs throughout the country have garnered the trust and support of the children’s network to collaborate in the interest of both the caregiver and the child(ren) for whom they care. One representative wanted to know what types of respite services other states are offering to older relative caregivers raising children and how these services are being marketed to distinguish them from respite services for caregivers of the frail elderly. Also, a participant shared her agency’s difficulty in adapting existing grandparent support services located within other agencies into aging related services as prescribed by their SUA.

Several representatives described their agency’s planning process and program strategies to serve this caregiver population:

The AoA Regional Office in Atlanta, **Georgia** is working collaboratively with the Southeast Hub Director for the Administration for Children and Families (administers programs in eight states in the Southeast), as well as other organizations including the Atlanta Regional Commission AAA and Georgia State University’s Project Health Grandparents, to develop a replicable model that focuses on providing support for grandparents who serve as the primary caregiver for their grandchildren. The collaborative group also plans to contact Aid to Children of Imprisoned Mothers in Atlanta for their input. A Steering Committee was established and the level of interest and participation was reported to be very high. As the group moves into the planning phase, they will disband the Steering Committee and form a Planning Committee.

An AAA representative in **Louisiana** reported that her AAA’s Advisory Council advocated in support of this caregiver population. In fact, half of the council members reported that they had cared for a grandchild or great niece/nephew at some point. The AAA opted to expend the 10% allocation for counseling services—offering legal assistance to grandparents in accessing available services for their grandchildren.

An AAA representative from **Missouri** reported that her agency issued an RFP for grandparent support programs and received two proposals. The first proposal came from the local Children’s Hospital, which has a history of working with grandparents and assisting them in gaining custody of and obtaining medical services for their grandchildren. The hospital is currently working with several grandparent support groups (14 in the PSA) and the AAA plans to collaborate with them on providing “caregiver training and support” around resource utilization, legal issues, and parenting issues. Secondly, the AAA selected a proposal from a consortium of their caring communities program and the local state university to develop a structured respite program for grandparent caregivers that addresses academic and cultural support activities.

A representative from the **Delaware** SUA described her agency’s partnership with a community-based organization, Children and Families First (C&FF), to implement the “Grandparent and Relative Caregivers Respite Pilot Program.” Although the program is still in the planning and development phase, they plan to offer the following services: a before and after school program for kindergarten children, a six-hour Saturday children-only gathering, memberships to youth organizations, and three hours of in-home respite. For further information, contact Ramona Way, C&FF, at (302) 658-5177 or ramona.way@cffde.org. In addition to the pilot program, the SUA is partnering with the Community Legal Aid Society, Inc. to develop a legal handbook directed to the legal issues that caregivers face.

In **Rhode Island**, \$5,000 of the state’s funds for serving grandparent caregivers will augment the Brookdale Foundation’s seed grant awards for support group development and the other \$25,000 will be used to fund scholarships for children in elder kincare families to attend camp during school vacations through “Kidcamp Connection.” This service allows elders a reprieve from daily caregiving responsibilities and provides the kids an opportunity to participate in fun, educational, and recreational programs. They are collaborating with the YMCA camps

throughout the state to bring the Kidkamp Connection to elder kincare families' local communities.

An AAA representative in **Illinois** reported that based on the results of focus groups, the agency allocated 10% of their Title III-E funding to legal service providers to specifically serve grandparents raising grandchildren. The services include legal counsel and community education on grandparenting issues. One of the providers created a chapter on grandparent issues for their "Senior Citizens Handbook...Laws and Programs Affecting Senior Citizens in Illinois." The AAA funded some of the printing for FY 2002. The AAA is also an active member of the State of Illinois Task Force on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and participates with the Brookdale Foundation's effort to increase the number of grandparent support groups.

Brookdale Foundation's Relatives as Parents Program (RAPP)

Additionally, Pat Janik at AoA shared information regarding the application process for RAPP's State Seed Grant Initiative for 2002. The initiative is designed to encourage and promote the development or expansion of services for grandparents and other relatives who have taken on the responsibility of surrogate parenting, when the biological parents are unwilling or unable to do so. Up to five Public State Agencies will be chosen through a competitive RFP process. Selected agencies will receive a \$10,000 grant over a two-year period. The agencies will also receive training and technical assistance. Interested agencies should submit proposals by March 6, 2002. For more information and application procedures, call the Brookdale Foundation at (212) 308-7355 or visit their Web site at <http://www.ewol.com/brookdale/default.html>.

In addition, the Generations United Web site, <http://www.gu.org> also contains helpful information about grandparents raising grandchildren and the National Family Caregiver Support Program.